HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PALM DESERT

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

O.H 36

COOK, ROBERT & WILMA

Interviewed by

Patricia Young

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INTERVIEWEES: ROBERT & WILMA COOK

INTERVIEWER: Patricia Young

SUBJECT:

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TRANSCRIBER: Linda A. Jantzen

PY: This is an interview with Robert Cook and Wilma Cook for the Historical Society of Palm Desert Oral History Project on April 19, Saturday, 1980, in Indio. It's one o'clock in the afternoon.

I think we can start by talking about your time in the valley here. I think perhaps we should start with your father because he was certainly important in the Indian Wells area and to the valley as a whole.

RC: Start when he first came to the valley?

PY: Yes.

RC: Well, he came to the valley in 1913 on February the fifteenth, I believe, and we lived first on what is now Avenue 50, south of Indio, west of Coachella three miles and south of Indio three miles. And that was a homestead of forty acres. And we lived on that and got title to that. And in the meantime my father had filed

on a desert claim in what was then Indian Wells area. And later became Cook Street. And he sold the forty acres on the Avenue 50, and we moved to Indian Wells after he had had about ten acres leveled and the well put down and the beginnings of a house. The house wasn't completed when we moved out there in 1917. At that time there was nothing growing on the hundred and sixty acres except some seedling dates that were planted to prove up on the land to get title and show that we had water there, and could grow a crop. And after the witnesses had been out there to view the seedling date palms, well, the rats ate up all that there was left. (chuckle) And we had, there were no roads when we first were preparing to move out there. They were building the road from near Indio to Palm Desert on very nearly the line that Highway 111 now follows, although it has been straightened and some of the hills eliminated, going right over the, up and down the sand dunes. And that road was completed, almost completed, when the rain, heavy rains came in 1916 and washed out a lot of it. And they had to move part of it over about fifty yards to avoid the channel and paralleled the channel in front of what is now Cook Street and Highway 111. The roads were

mainly just from Coachella to Palm Desert, was just two wheel tracks, and mostly horses. There were very few cars that came that way or very few cars came through Indio at that time. There was just an occasional car. It was a rare event. And three of us small children, we would always run out to see a car go by and wave. They would wave back. Quite an exciting time to see an automobile go by. But before we moved, we had a Model T Ford, and on moving day, which I remember very well, I was then seven years old, and my father drove the team of horses and the wagon well loaded down with furniture and belongings. And my mother drove the Model T Ford assisted by my older brother. He drove part of the way, I think. And it took all day, of course, to make the trip from one location to the other with the team of horses and wagon at least. And there was a school at Point Happy. What was then called Point Happy is right near the Washington Street and 111. And this schoolhouse, one-room schoolhouse, had just been built about a year before that. So we were immediately enrolled in the school as soon as we had moved and settled down in the house. That school was moved about two or three years later to near the Indian Wells store, which is, what's

it called, Carl Bray. Is that the artist that the schoolhouse there was right near where Carl Bray's home is now. And that was closer to the Cook Ranch, so all that we, we had to travel by car. It was too far to walk. But there was one year that my grandmother came and drove us in a one-horse cart to school every morning. And came after us every evening. And then there never was a school bus during the time we were in grammar school. I finished eighth grade in 1923, I believe it was, 1923. And the school had become very small at that time. It was still a one-room schoolhouse, but there was very few children left in the area. So the school continued maybe four or five years after that, and then it was combined with the Indio school. It was always called the Point Happy School District out there up until it was merged into the Indio school. Now, turn it off a second.

PY: Did you, we were talking about the school. You said there were few children left. What was happening to the families in the area?

RC: Well, there weren't many moving into the area, and the older ones had gone on to high school that were there when we moved out there. There was a few, very few Mexican families in the area. And there was one Negro

boy in school, I think, during all that time I was in grammar school. But where the others went, I don't know. There was not too many people living in the area.

PY: Do you know what area it actually serviced?

RC: It was one of the larger districts in Riverside County. It started about two miles east of Washington Street, and went up to the edge of the mountains. And west it went about halfway to Palm Springs, I think. And north boundary would have been somewhere near the Whitewater River, I expect, because there wasn't anybody living in the sand dune area anyway.

PY: So mainly it was rancher's children that were going to school.

RC: Oh, yes. One of our neighbors was the Chapin family. And Ernest Chapin had a garage in Indio for many, many years called Ernie's Garage. And I don't know if he ever went to Point Happy School or not, but he was out of school when I first remember him.

PY: So he was much older than you?

RC: Yes. Like ten years, something like that.

PY: Who was the teacher at that time? Do you remember that?

RC: The first year the teacher was Miss Darms. I'd been taught at home for, all three of us had been taught at

home by my mother before that before we moved. And I started in the second grade. My sister, who was older than I am, was in the second grade. And my brother, the oldest, was in the third grade. And that was in the spring in April, so when school was out, why the teacher promoted all of us so that the following fall my brother would have been in the fourth grade. No, he would have been in the, well, I'm not real sure on that. Fourth or fifth. And my sister and I were in the second grade that fall and were soon promoted to the third grade before the year was over. And what were we talking about?

PY: Oh, and that she was the teacher for . . .

RC: Oh, the teacher. Miss Darms didn't come back the second year. And the teacher then was Miss Baldwin. And she lived at the Indian Wells store in one of their cottages. And she was there for three or four years. And then we had a teacher whose name was Rogers, who turned out to be a little unstable herself and didn't last the year out. (chuckle) And then we had Mrs. Clayton whose husband was here for his health, TB. And they had three children about the same ages as the Cook children. But then they moved back up to Los Angeles area after about two years. And by that time we were all in high school.

PY: Were these people, the teachers, all living in the Indian Wells area?

RC: Yes. I don't know how they were obtained. Mrs. Clayton came looking for a job, I know, and found out there was an opening there. And my mother at that time was the school board clerk, clerk of the school board, so she came to see my mother and was hired immediately. I remember that. But the others, I don't know about.

PY: Did you feel like you were removed from everything that was going on in comparison to where you had before?

RC: I'm sure my mother did. I was too young to know anything. I don't remember anything before we came to this area. I just remember arriving, my first memory. Seeing the train, we came on the Southern Pacific train. They had what they called the sidewinder, which you may have heard of. So we got off that at Indio and it stopped there, I think, twenty minutes. And then we got back on and went to Coachella, and then got off there. I remember seeing the train going away and leaving us there. I felt a little bit desolate, I would say, at that time not knowing what it all meant really.

PY: Do you know why your father wanted to move to the area?

RC: Well, he was selected the date growing as something he

thought he would like to do. He'd been in the indoor work and his doctor told him he should get out in the open air. And he made two or three trips to the area, decided he wanted to grow dates, and that's what he did.

PY: Where were you moving from?

RC: Los Angeles. He was on the electrical manufacturing and school supply business, school labs and clocks, electric clocks, he installed in schools. And to help out the income after we moved here, he did electrical wiring and also later sold electric motors and installed pumps, pumping water. He did that for at least six or seven years, until he got busy in the date packing house. My father was president and general manager of the, it was then called the Deglet Noor Date Growers Association in Indio until the time of his death. That was his employment. He started the association on the road to becoming a full-fledged business, but they had a lot of trouble after his death. Changed managers about every year for a number of years until my older brother got old enough to go down and take it over. And he was manager from about, my father died in 1927 and my brother became manager of the date association in, I would say in 1933, around then.

PY: Was your father associated with William Paul, Captain Paul?

RC: Captain Paul. Nina Paul Shumway's father?

PY: Correct.

RC: Well, they worked together in an earlier organization called Coachella Valley Date Growers Association. And Mr. Paul was head of that when they were importing off-shoots from Algeria and Tunis. And then they got a packing house going in Thermal in which my father managed that for a few years. And Mr. Paul, I think they had some differences somewhere along the way, and Mr. Paul pulled out. And I don't know if he ever had anything more to do with the association or not. But anyway, it folded up mainly due to the fact that the Deglet Noor Association started in Indio and a number of their members pulled out to join that. And my father didn't want them to start that at the time they did. I know my mother has commented on this a number of times. But they wanted to go ahead with it anyway, so he did join it for one acre of dates so that he could be a member of the new organization. And . . .

PY: The new one being the Deglet Noor?

RC: Yes, in Indio. You want all . . . We're talking about

Indio history more than your Palm Desert area.

PY: I think it affects the area because of the . . .

RC: We lived in Palm Desert at that time.

PY: What did they consider the area at that point? Were you living in Indian Wells?

RC: It was Indian Wells, I think would be the only name that we had. There was nothing between the Indian Wells store and Mr. Duvall's ranch, which was on Bob Hope Drive and Frank Sinatra Drive area, except maybe two or three small houses and people starting out like we were.

PY: When did the Duvalls come? Were they prior to your coming?

RC: I don't remember, but I know he was there about the time that we moved out there. And how long he'd been there at that time, I don't know. Too bad we don't have Otho Moore to ask because he told me one time that he was out there shortly after we moved there, talking to my father. And he didn't remember me. I didn't remember him. He remembered being there and, because he moved away shortly after that himself, didn't come back for a number of years.

PY: Who were your other neighbors in Indian Wells at the time?

RC: At the Indian Wells store, there was Mr. and Mrs. O'Neal.

That was three miles from Cook Street. And the train was west of Indian Wells store, was a Harmon Ranch. You've probably met some of the members of the Harmon family. No. Well, Mrs. Harmon then had the colored glass shop out there, was living on what had been the Harmon Ranch. And she was related to them, I understood. Although I don't know what the relationship was. And there was Mr. Blair who was also in that same area near the Whitewater channel. And I know Mr. Blair was flooded out in that 1916 flood, so he built his house on higher ground and later across Highway 111 on the south side of the road. But that place, now I'm getting myself confused. That was the Harmon Ranch that both of them were flooded out, but the Harmon Ranch had been sold to, sold or rented to Mr. Greer. And he built on the south side of 111. And Mr. Blair built a house on the top of a sand dune, a mesquite dune which was near the river channel on his own property. Most of the traffic through there was still horse and wagon at that time.

PY: Up until when, do you know?

RC: Well, it gradually picked up every year. The road was not paved from Palm Desert to Palm Springs until in the early thirties. And after that we got lots more traffic.

And the Highway 99 it was then, that was put through while I was in high school. I would guess it was probably in 1925. Yes, 1924 or 1925, that that was completed through to Banning. Before that all the traffic there was went through Palm Springs.

PY: Did that make much difference in terms of tourists coming to the area at all?

RC: They were increasing and at Christmastime and January, February, there was quite a bit of traffic. People visiting, driving through.

PY: Frank Bogert told me that he used to, when he was going to school at UCLA, he used to camp out in Indian Wells. Was that . . .

RC: Who?

PY: Frank Bogert.

RC: Oh! I never was acquainted with him. My brother knew him. There was houses for rent to hunters. There was a lot of quail in the area. And when the quail season was open, the people would come down and rent one of those little canvas-sided, canvas-walled, shacks, I guess you'd call them. Just one-room building with a water faucet nearby. I think that was about all they were, wooden floor. But those were rented quite a bit of the

time. There was maybe eight or ten of those buildings. And Mr. and Mrs. O'Neal ran the store. They had a post office in the store even at that time. And there was a rural route started from, came out, picked up the mail in Indio and delivered it to all the mailboxes along the road out as far as what is now Rancho Mirage. There was a Mr. Frye that carried the mail and he had, at first he had a horse and buggy for that mail route. I think later he may have had a car. I don't remember too well about that. And near where he lived in Rancho Mirage there was two or three other houses. Dinsbore, I think the name was. I remember the family, they were a young married couple with one small child. And we drove out there to see them once or twice. People didn't see each other very often. And Mr. and Mrs. Burns, J. R. Burns, developed three tracts of a hundred and sixty acres each, I think, in what is now the Eisenhower Medical Center area. It was subdivided. He sold off some of it and others subdivided more later on. He, in order to make a go of his farming, he started a garage in Indio and he had the Buick agency. In 1926 we bought a Buick from him. I believe he had the Buick agency then. I kind of have to qualify some of these statements without

chance to try to remember about what happened to the other people before and after. But I know Mr. Burns was there for a number of years. And his wife took a job as bookkeeper at the Deglet Noor Date Association. And she was there up until after World War II was over; around 1948, I think, she resigned. She was the only one that was there through all that whole time, I think. Don Mitchell was there a lot of the time, but she was there before and after he was.

PY: Now was Don Mitchell farming in the Palm Desert area at that point or was he still in . . .

RC: He and my father purchased eighty acres from Mr. Wilsey, and that became known as the Cook and Mitchell tract, number one, Cook and Mitchell subdivision. And it was sold in five-acre or larger tracts all planted to dates. And the first eighty acres was just about sold out at the time my father died. And later Don Mitchell and my mother bought another eighty acres which included the part that Bill Cook's house was on. And I also had ten acres in that tract I owned for quite a few years.

PY: Where was the original eighty acres?

RC: On the corner of Cook Street and Highway . . . oh, the original eighty acres of Mitchell's?

PY: Yes. That your father had with Mitchell.

RC: Well, that would be next to Highway 111 and Deep Canyon Road. It's a long eighty acres.

PY: And then the second eighty acres?

RC: The second was another long acres, eighty acres, which were end to end with the first eighty acres, so it made a hundred and sixty acres in a, I guess, a mile, it would be a mile long.

PY: On down Deep Canyon.

RC: Third of the channel, Whitewater Channel.

PY: Now did your father own the land on the south side of 111 and Cook?

RC: Yes. The original desert claim was on the north side of 111 and Cook, and on the south side there was another hundred and sixty acres which he bought and sold off in tracts of ten, twenty and forty acres. So he didn't own any of that very long. And that included where Bert Cavanagh and Hal Cavanagh built their houses and included Robert Webb's twenty acres, I think. They each had twenty acres. I think Bert Cavanagh, Bert and Hal Cavanagh could each have had twenty acres now. And Bob Webb had at least twenty. I think he got twenty and then some more afterwards possibly.

PY: Was he on the west side of Cook Street?

RC: He would be on the east side of Cook Street and Fairway.

WC: Fairway Drive.

RC: Fairway Drive.

PY: So Indio side of Cook Street?

RC: Indio side of Cook Street, yes.

PY: Isn't that where Cavanagh was, too?

RC: His would be south of Cavanagh's, adjoining Cavanagh's on the south.

PY: Okay. And what about on the west side of Cook Street there, across Cook Street from Cavanagh? Did your father own . . .

RC: He didn't ever own any in that tract. Mr. Pinkley bought that at one time. I don't remember who owned it before that. That newspaper man, Pinkley. And right next to the Cook Ranch was the McGraw, McGaw Ranch, M-C-G-A-W, I think. And that could still be owned by them, I'm not sure.

PY: Where would the . . .

RC: Because there's a desert outpost date shop there.

PY: Oh, right, right. No, they don't own it. That's right. I talked to them on the phone. It's cousins of McGaw that own it.

RC: I never knew the McGaws, although there's Miss McGaw, I guess, that went to the historical society or pioneer society meeting I went to. And I couldn't place her, who she was at the time. But afterwards I found out that she was family. I think there was, it was written up by the Periscope, historical bulletin. I believe there were four brothers that came to the Oasis area. She was one of the, member of one of those families.

PY: Were they there when you moved to the area?

RC: We didn't get acquainted down in that Oasis area too much. Of course, I was going to school, high school, and then went away to college. And I never did know anyone of them unless they were kids in school the same time I was which I would be acquainted with. We hardly ever went, had any contact socially with anybody that lived that far away, a long ways away. We did stop at the Oasis service station now and then, and I know there was some people there that probably were members of that family. I don't remember them.

PY: You call it the Oasis. What are you referring to?

RC: There's a community called Oasis. They had an Oasis school and a store and service station, and sold grapefruit.

PY: Where was it located?

RC: On Highway 99 down between the Salton Sea and Sandy Corner. I'd say not too far from Valerie Jean's Corner.

PY: Were you familiar . . . Was the Gillette Ranch in that area when you moved to Indian Wells?

RC: The Gillette Ranch in Palm Desert?

PY: Yes.

RC: It was owned by Mr. McDonald, McDonald and Young store in Coachella, and Mr. McDonald, mostly I remember that he had a red beard. That's about all I can remember about him. (chuckle) It was quite a novelty to see a man with a red beard. And he tried real hard to get hops to grow on that land. He planted four or five times, and the wind would come along and blow it all out. He built that pumping plant and reservoir which one time made it into swimming pool there in little Palm Desert. And he eventually, I think after his death, was sold to the Gillette people.

PY: Oh.

RC: And Gillettes planted all them ~~Zahidi~~ Saidy dates, which were imported in the early twenties from Egypt. They were not successful and practically all of them abandoned the valley. If there's any growing, I don't know. Maybe Lapland's have a few and one or two others. Cook Ranch

had five acres of them, and they were all dug up eventually after we sold it.

PY: What did your father mainly have?

RC: He grew Deglet Noor dates and when the trees were small, he planted cotton during World War I, he planted cotton. No, wait a minute. During World War I, he planted castor beans between the date trees, and that was used to make castor oil for lubricating the airplane motors. And then after that he planted cotton, and there was a new variety at that time called acalla a cow, or acala, A-C-A-L-A. And I remember that we took, we got more out of the seeds for that because they were very scarce. There was a cotton gin near Coachella and another one near Thermal, I think. Anyway, the cotton was a very good grade of cotton, but the seeds were worth more than the cotton was. It was a medium long staple cotton here. Anybody that's an agriculturalist will know what that is because I never did any farming myself except in growing the dates. And I had ten acres in that second tract over to Cook and Mitchell, as I mentioned which started out as two acres, and then when I took it over, I had the rest of the ten acres leveled and planted and piped And I owned that up until 1962, I sold it.

PY: So the Cook family does not own any more of the property in there.

RC: The Cook family does not own any property in the Coachella Valley area.

PY: Was your father instrumental in terms of the date industry experimenting with dates or with the growing of the crop?

RC: Well, at first the growing of the crop was very experimental. They had to go by trial and error. And the packing and shipping of them, however, was where he contributed the most to the date industry, I would say. But methods have changed so now that anything they did then, it no longer applies. He did have research done on cold storage, and the first cold storage plant was under construction at the time of his death. It had never been used. The Deglet Noor Date Growers Association was the same location where Teneco West is now operating.

PY: That's a long time to have something that's never been used 1927. When did the Arkells and the, I don't know all of them, Moran. There were two ranches near the old Cook home later.

RC: The Arkells and Swingle owned the land between Arkells and the Cook property, and we used part of the Cook property. Then there was another relative of Arkells and they had

a tract, too. I don't remember their name. Maybe that's the one you're referring to.

PY: It's where they're building Desert Horizons Country Club now.

RC: Yes. Of course, my brother had sold, he had forty acres back in there at the back northeast corner of that section which he sold half of. And I don't know the name of the people that bought that. It was sold and resold a time or two. And I think that is included in this Arkell development now. What do you call that?

PY: Desert Horizons.

RC: Desert Horizons, yes.

PY: But you aren't familiar with the Arkells at all, or . . .

RC: Oh, I know the Arkell family, yes. Very well.

PY: Can you elaborate a little on what they're like?

RC: I can't remember when they came. I know that the property was owned by Mr. Carpenter. And he got Mr. Arkell as a backer to develop it, I think. They operated as partners the first year or two. And then I think Mr. Arkell probably bought him out and came to live there. But at the time I came back after World War II was over, I got acquainted with the Arkell family. I didn't really know them before that. Mr. and Mrs. Arkell, and they had

two daughters, their nieces. Mrs. Arkell's brother and they had two daughters. Her name was Mattie. How do you spell Mattie? M-A-T-T-Y.

WC: I'll be darned, I don't know.

RC: I don't know.

PY: You mentioned the name of Wiltsey as being a person who sold property to Don Mitchell and father.

RC: Yes. That tract where this McGaw Ranch belonged to Wiltsey and he sold half of it, I think, to Mr. Krutz, K-R-U-T-Z. Does that appear in any of your inquiries?

PY: Might have. It sounds familiar, but it's not . . .

RC: Well, Mr. Krutz developed that eighty acres next to the Cook Ranch. And my father assisted him on providing help in getting the trees planted and that part of it. And he hired a manager whose name was Robert Longacre, a young fellow just out of school. And that would have been in 1922. I can remember that because I was in Los Angeles at that particular time. My mother had rented the house up there that summer. Then my brother was getting interested in radio, so Mr. Robert Longacre who my brother had gone to high school with, they both became interested in radio and working on it. Then that ranch, getting back to the Krutz Ranch, the next superintendent

of that ranch was Harry, real estate man in Indio.

WC: Whittlesey.

RC: Whittlesey, Harry Whittlesey. And during the time I was in college, why Harry Whittlesey was manager of the Krutz Ranch. And then Mr. Krutz died somewhere along about that time. And some of the relatives of the Krutz family took it over. Then that's where the McGaws came in. Some relative of McGaws or some of them married in, connection by marriage, I think. Anyway they took over the operation of the ranch. From there on, I don't know too much about it. The other half of the property which Wiltsey still owned, Don Mitchell did the negotiating with Mr. Wiltsey because my father was afraid he'd want too much money if he did. I remember that. (chuckle) So my father wanted his name kept out of it until the deal was closed.

PY: Your father thought that he was too soft a touch, or that he was

RC: He'd just raise the price.

PY: People thought they had too much money?

RC: No, but the Cook Ranch was the show place of the area. Everybody drove through there would always stop at the Cook Ranch. And my father had lots of friends in southern

California. And anything that would indicate that there was a development in the offing if my father had something to do with it, he felt would automatically up the price.

PY: Why was your place a showcase?

RC: Well, it was the only date garden at that time with Deglet Noor dates of any size west of Indio. Well, the Gillette people had a ranch which was later owned by Codekas sun gold date gardens. That was developed about the same time, I think, as the Cook Ranch.

PY: Where was that?

RC: Right about one mile that way from here.

WC: Well, it's on Highway 111.

RC: Highway 111.

WC: Before you go to Jefferson Street. Wasn't that right?

RC: Highway 111 and Shields Road.

PY: So it was mainly the dates that made it a showcase.

RC: Show place is what I meant to say.

PY: Oh, show place.

RC: Yes. Well, we had tall trees and Tamarisk trees and dates and a few fruit, fig, grapes, grapefruit, two lemon trees, two olive trees that didn't ever bear, peaches, apricots.

PY: Were you living in the area year round at that point?

RC: We were. However, the family would usually get out, all except my father, usually get out in the summer for a month or two. We went to Newport Beach, I think, three years. And went to Beaumont one year. To Oceanside and Santa Ana. Also Glendale one year. That wasn't very cool there. The reason we went to Glendale was my father had traded off some property for a house up there. And the house was empty, so we went to stay in it until he could sell it.

PY: Now your house was a frame house, is that correct?

RC: It was a two-story frame with redwood siding and plaster . . .

TAPE 1, SIDE 2:

PY: And what was, oh, you have to get going, don't you?

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RC: Pretty quick. The house was two-story frame house with the outside was redwood siding. And inside was woodlamp and plaster downstairs. Upstairs, the first year it was built, the walls were canvas. They ran out of money in building here. It cost more than it was supposed to. So the upstairs, we had canvas awnings that would raise up, the flaps, you know, raise them up and drop them down. And we had a sleeping porch on two sides of the upstairs

portion, so we all slept out in the summertime. And we moved the cots inside in the wintertime. And we had white asbestos roof, asbestos roofing paper. And we also had a solar hot-water heater. Not the first year, but after a year or two. And a hot-water tank and inside plumbing and very unusual in those days, the desert. We also had one of the, I think the second Kelvinator refrigeration unit installed for keeping our food cool. And this was build in an old wood ice box where you put the ice in instead of the compartment for ice, it had the freezing unit in it. And it also had a water pipe in it and a tank for cooling water, drinking water. And we had electricity there. It was available before we moved out, and it was due to Mr. McDonald of the Palm Desert Ranch, that we had electricity out here. Otherwise we wouldn't have had it then. It had been promised to him by the Southern Sierras Power Company to run a line from Edom, which is now Thousand Palms. But they never developed Edom like they thought they would, so they ran the line from Coachella out to the Palm Desert.

WC: Tell about the telephone service.

PY: There was telephone service.

RC: Yes, let's get through with the electrical business first. Our pump was, there was a pit dug seventy feet deep, four feet in diameter, I believe. It could have been only three feet because I wasn't very big then. But it was, had a ladder all the way to the bottom of the seventy feet, and I know my father could rest on the way out by putting his back against the backside of the cement pipe, I guess you'd call it. And his feet on the rungs of the ladder. I couldn't do that; I wasn't big enough. But I did go down to the bottom of that several times. And the pump ~~on~~ and the electric motor were down at the bottom, both the pump and the motor, what they called a direct-connected pump motor. And there was a time when the water came up in the bottom of that which was after the 1927 flood, I think. The water came up about three feet into the bottom of that pit. So they left the pump there, but pulled the motor out, so we couldn't pump any water until the water went down. I don't know how many months that was.

PY: What did you do?

RC: I think that we may have to haul some drinking water in. I don't remember too well.

PY: How deep was the well that you dug?

RC: I don't recall, but probably two hundred and fifty feet, under three hundred anyway. It was drilled by Mr. Cooper of Indio. And the pit was dug by Mr. Chapin, Sr., Ernie Chapin's father. And Wilma mentioned the telephone. At the time we moved out there, there was a man by the name of Hayhurst who lived over next to the mountain in what is now El Dorado Country Club, I think, in that area. And he, on his own, he bought the wire, I think maybe took up a collection and bought wire and strung the wire all the way from Indio out past his house and on to the Cook Ranch. And where there was electric poles, he fastened it to the electric poles and someplaces it was just on a fence. And some of the way he had to put up some poles himself. And that was the kind of a telephone where you had to turn the crank if you wanted to call anybody. And it would ring on everybody's telephone all the way along the line, all the way to Indio. Everybody had a different ring, one long and three shorts, and such as that. Well, that was used for several years until the Coachella Valley telephone line, Mr. Newman's company in Thermal who started the Coachella Valley Telephone Company, he was expanding and Mr. Stadley who I think had helped install this first line, he was there

working for the telephone company, so he took some of the wire off of our line and used it for the other line, we were told. Anyway, we found out our line wasn't working anymore. And I think it did get hooked up again once after that maybe, but it was along towards 1930, I think, before we had a telephone line out to Palm Desert.

PY: A real one, you mean.

RC: A real one, yes.

PY: When did Mr. Newman, no Hayhurst . . .

RC: I said Mr. Hayhurst. I know between Mr. Stadley and Mr. Hayhurst they got it built. Now I don't know which one instigated the thing. Mr. Hayhurst lived alone and he liked to exercise his lungs. And he liveda good mile and a half from our ranch. And we'd hear him early in the morning out there yelling at the top of his lungs. (laughter)

PY: When did he actually string that wire? Was it in the twenties?

RC: Yes, or sooner. Eighteen or nineteen.

PY: So most of the time you were there, you had some kind of phone service.

RC: Yes. I remember walking with my father along the line past Mr. Hayhurst's corner and on to Indian Wells, which

in a direct line was about three miles. The way we went it was probably nearer five. And I only did that once.

WC: Well, didn't you say the line was made of something other than regular telephone wire?

RC: No, I think it was telephone wire, the kind they used then. There was a few places where they might have hooked it onto a barbed wire fence and used the barbed wire.

PY: You know the house that sits up on a hill in Indian Wells that Dr. Gurley had?

RC: Dr. Gurley. Yes.

PY: Who owned that house originally?

RC: I don't think his name is Dr. Gurley. He's called Doc Gurley.

PY: Doc Gurley, right.

RC: Yes. He's not a medical doctor. I don't think he's any kind. He was a veterinarian. I don't think he has a degree even. He's a World War I vet. I think he learned it in the Army.

PY: Looks like some good basic training.

RC: Yes.

PY: Who originally built that house? Was that part of the Harmon Ranches?

RC: The house was built by Billikie I think he started the . . . There's some other name that I should be remembering, but Mr. Billikie lived in San Francisco, I think, and he came down there. No, he was a Los Angeles man. He came down there, spent a lot of time there. And then I don't know when Doc Gurley bought it, but it was after I went into the Army. I know that.

PY: Did Billikie build it in twenty or later?

RC: Billikie built a house back behind in what is now apartment. In those apartments back there or condominiums or whatever.

PY: In Indian Wells?

RC: Right near, just beyond that house you're speaking of, Mr. . . .

WC: Where Desi Arnaz' hotel is, back in that.

RC: No, no, no.

PY: In the other way

RC: Just next to . . .

PY: Carl Gray?

RC: Next to Gurley's house, behind it, next to it.

WC: This is the

RC: They have apartments in Palm Desert also. Where Ray Lamb stayed, you know.

WC: I know it, but I can't come up with a name.

RC: Mrs. Elms worked for them in the office. (chuckle) Well, we don't know their name.

PY: But that's where the Harmon house was, you say.

RC: No, it isn't quite where the Harmon house was. I'm not sure whether it was Billiki or Billiki father-in-law that built that first house. And I think Billiki built the big house up on the hill. I'm not positive whether he did. It could have been that Doc Gurley built it, but I think it was built before he bought it.

PY: One other question, when you talked about those tent cabins, where were they?

RC: You know where the Indian Wells store used to be?

PY: Yes, you said that was around Carl Gray's.

RC: There at Carl Gray's, yes. Well, there was a I think there's still some trees that are about dead along, I think it was right along that row of trees. There was a larger house and then a half a dozen or a dozen of these smaller cabins. They were later on converted into motel cabins. At first they were just canvas-sided cabins.

PY: Was canvas a common building material in the desert area?

RC: Like a tent, you know. If you didn't have anything, you

put up a tent.

PY: Was that common, though, here? I mean, like Sacramento was a tent city when it started out. Was it common to see canvas around here?

RC: I would say no. There weren't too many. It was too windy. Canvas didn't last too long.

PY: But was it used as a temporary . . .

RC: More temporary, yes.

PY: So it was common as a temporary building material?

RC: Yes. People that came down for their health and didn't have any money. There was a lot of them, Palm Springs, Indio, Arizona. In those days everybody that had TB. There was lots of them then. All came to California and Arizona. And the ones without any money would put up a tent. My grandfather was one of them, on my mother's side. They lived in Arizona for a year. I'm not sure whether it was near Phoenix or someplace in the middle of Arizona. And after the first year, they decided to move to Whittier. And he stayed there the rest of his life. He didn't live too long after he got to Whittier, like three or four years.

WC: I think Isma has survived all of this.

RC: Yes, I wish you could interview my mother, but I'm afraid

it would be a lost cause now because she can't hear very well, and she's a hundred and four. And she's still pretty much in control of what she does or does not do. But she watches television. She can't, she can talk pretty good, but she can't hear, she can't see very well. But she remembers a lot of things, more than I do.

PY: Where does she live?

RC: She's near us.

WC: Near us in a home

RC: She's in a private home now. I did have her in a convalescent home. That didn't work out too well. She's in a private home now. I'm sure we haven't covered half the things that should have been covered, but maybe if you're back up our way again some day, I can look up some of the pictures.

PY: Oh great!

RC: Give you some more history on our particular house, where we were, where we lived.

WC: I think maybe something that Bob doesn't really want, life was really, I'm sure, a terrible hardship then. The summers were so hot and there were not the conveniences which we now experience in desert living. Desert living is comfortable now, but it was hard. Rugged. (laughter)

RC: Desert coolers were not known until about 1930. Before that we had fans, all the cooling there was. You had refrigerators by then, but originally all they had was a burlap covered box with water dripping on it to keep your food cool. The first four years we lived without any electricity. It was pretty rough.

PY: Was it common not to have electricity in the valley?

RC: Electricity was just coming in about the same time we moved in Thermal and Coachella and Indio, all got electricity about 1914 to 1916. And my father did most of the wiring in Coachella. I don't know about the other towns.

PY: Did Indian Wells seem remote to your parents, or to your mother after Coachella?

RC: I would say it was possibly less remote than where we lived on Coachella because when we moved to Indian Wells, we had the paved road. Yes, we had the paved road at the time we moved in and shortly after. And a car.

WC: But by comparison with the backwoods, I would think that all of it would seem very nice.

RC: Oh, yes.

PY: It must have been a real trip to get into Los Angeles or anyplace that had a large population.

RC: Well, you could ride the train. There was what they called the sidewinder which left Indio about midnight. And get into Los Angeles early in the morning. I guess it went down into Imperial Valley one day and back the next. I'm not sure about that. They may have had one going each way each day.

WC: Well, since your organization is interested in the adobe dwellings, you probably are aware of Bill Cook's adobe home.

PY: I was going to ask about that.

RC: As far as I know, it's still there. He built what started out to be a garage, but they were going to live in the garage until they could get more built, but the garage ended up as their living room. And they built on a kitchen and back porch. And then they added a bedroom wing, which is also adobe. The first part was all hand built, mostly hand-made bricks, the way I understood it, although what your report that you sent me said something about bricks that were made over near La Quinta. And I know there were some made over there. And the La Quinta Hotel was built about that time, too.

PY: I think it was the tiles that Joe Valenzuela made.

RC: Oh.

PY: You know, for the . . . well, there were none in that house

RC: Oh, for the roof?

PY: For the roof, but also the porch at La Quinta.

RC: But the walls at the La Quinta Hotel were adobe, too.

PY: Probably made on the site, though. No?

RC: Well, some person was mentioned who was in the contracting business, I think, in building adobe houses and making them back in that La Quinta Cove. But I'm not sure of my grounds on that. I think Bert Cavanagh would have to answer that.

PY: Well, he couldn't remember the name of the fellow that did it, but then Montoya remembered the Mexican fellow that had actually been in charge of the crew that made ~~in~~ the adobe for his house. Do you remember Ben at all? He was working on the Cook Ranch for awhile.

RC: Yes. There were several Montoyas and one that I knew was Arthur. And then was Ben his brother or his nephew?

PY: His brother.

RC: His brother. I didn't know Ben too well. There was Jose Ogas who was the brother-in-law also, worked on the Cook Ranch.

WC: Well, Bill and Carmen lived in that house until almost

1960, didn't they?

RC: Yes, they did.

WC: I have to tell you the story that Carmen mentioned once upon a time. This was the house of adobe. She said the lady in the chauffeured limousine stopped on the pretense of inquiring directions. And then she asked Carmen if she could see inside the house. And Carmen very graciously admitted her, and she looked around. And she said, "How charmingly primitive." (laughter)

RC: Did Carmen take that as a compliment or what?

WC: Well, she was amused by it.

PY: Crash.

WC: (Microphone is too far away for me to hear what she said)

PY: Was adobe a common building material then?

RC: Well, everything before California was part of the United States, most everything was adobe. It was the only building material there was. Either that or stone. Until they started making bricks, fire bricks.

WC: But it wasn't all that common in this area at that time.

RC: In this area. No, everything was wood in this area that I can remember, the earlier houses.

WC: But, of course, it was cool.

RC: Except . . .

WC: That was one of the bad . . .

RC: Except for a few old ranch houses that were adobe. Not many.

WC: (I can't hear her again.)

RC: But Arthur Montoya and my brother and my Uncle Ernest did most of the work on that first twenty by twenty building that they put up. But Uncle Ernest, my Uncle Ernest is A. E. Swindler's father. He had the cement business in Coachella. I think the three of them did practically the whole thing. My brother did the wiring the plumbing. And Arthur Montoya and with one or two others helping him made the adobes.

PY: Your neighbor Swingle was the man that owned the land next to the Cook land, is that the same man Swingle who was so prominent in the date industry?

RC: Yes. The Cook Ranch was eventually sold to him, all that hadn't been sold off to other people. And before that he had bought twenty acres from my father soon after he came here, I think. The twenty acres was adjoining the Carpenter Ranch, which later was the Arkell Ranch.

PY: Was there anything actually developed when Carpenter owned that property?

RC: Well, as I say, Mr. Arkell financed whatever he did and I know that they did develop some of it. How much, I don't know. They bought the palm trees. My father had a nursery business in the . . . this is going to take another half hour. Better not get into it. Anyway, there was such a thing as Yuma trees of which I have a picture. And they were brought by rail from Yuma, Arizona, to Indio. And they were the start of most all of Deglet Noor date ranches because the importation had stopped, and there was no other source of the Deglet Noors. So . . .

PY: The claim your father got . . .

RC: Arkell had the, quite a number of those Yuma palms.

PY: Your father's desert claim, was that one of the only in that area or was that a homesteading claim?

RC: I don't, I'm not up on the legal end of that. A homestead had to be lived on for a certain length of time to prove up on it. A desert claim you could file on it, put water on it and plant something on it, but you didn't have to live on it.

PY: Right.

RC: And a desert claim could be a hundred and sixty acres, whereas, I think, a homestead was maybe limited to forty

acres. I'm not sure of that. But anyway, my father filed on both of them at the same time before we moved out here. He had both of them picked out.

PY: Both.

RC: Both the homestead and the desert claim.

PY: Homestead Coachella or . . .

RC: The homestead in Coachella and the desert claim in Palm Desert. He'd filed on them. He didn't have title to them, but he filed them.

PY: Interesting he picked out something that was so far from everything else and no road. (laughter)

RC: Yes.

PY: Do you know how much he paid per acre at all? Have you any idea?

RC: Nothing.

PY: Oh, nothing.

RC: I think he had to pay a fee to somebody that, well, like a founder's fee. Somebody would locate it. It would have already been filed on by someone else, and this was called a relinquishment on the desert claim. And I don't know what the homestead was. But anyway, he paid somebody for, I think he gave them some land that he owned or something, for permission to file on this. It would

be something to pay for your title. I mean, you have to pay for a title, some amount, the government. That would have been the only charge other than the development work you had to do.

WC: Have you lived on the desert quite awhile yourself?

PY: Five years, that's all.

WC: And where did you come from before that?

PY: Northern California.

WC: From Northern California.

PY: I came in when it was growing like a weed.

RC: Well, we've been gone for seven years.

PY: You know what it's like, too,to come back and barely recognize . . .

WC: And lots of Southern Californians are moving north. ✓ my nephew moved to Redding. She packed her things.

END OF INTERVIEW